

INTERESTING PROCESS OF MAKING NATIONAL GODS IN JAPAN

Hold That Ancestor and Hero Worship Has on the Practical Mind of the Modern Japanese

By JOSEPH I. C. CLARKE.

THE Emperor and Empress will be crowned in the Yasukuni Shrine, at Tokyo, on the 29th instant at 10 a. m. in the morning respectively to worship personally before the shrine where the deities of the cause of the Emperor and the country, clean and are worshipped as guardian deities of the State. Before and after the day of the Imperial coronation, during six days, as already stated, a festival will be held at the shrine and the heroes of Tsing-tao will be called—Japan Times, April 18, 1915.

THUS does modern Japan turn aside from its pressing problems, to glorify its heroic dead—the dead of Tsing-tao of 1914 have entered the national pantheon; henceforth they live with a godly life of their own.

"Yes, they are making a god of them."

We were talking in Tokyo about the fate of battle in old and new Japan and its foreign wars, and some one had let drop the name of Tachibana. There was a sudden chorus of sultry and of young college men with some of awe in his tones suggested the curious process of creation of the divine as something well on its way.

And it was quite true. It was doubtless the mystical trend in Lafcadio Hearn's extremely sensitive mind that made him practically begin his "Interpretation" of Japan to the Western world by examining the attitude of the Japanese to the next world. He found the latter filled in that people's belief with the ghosts of all the Japanese who have passed through the gates of death from the beginning of time, from the beginning of the gods. He devotes much attention to ancestor worship.

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It was possibly good psychology to the study of the people of Japan from that standpoint. The religious, or what answers for the religious, faith of a people gives a certain clue to many vital characteristics when you are bent on meticulous differentiation. But all peoples have believing, because ancient beliefs about the souls of the dead, and they affect life and conduct in about the same way, so that after all you end the inquiry about where you started. In other words, conduct between man and man and man and woman—the working of the social contract—is really affected by the constant facts about us in the living world rather than in any reflection from the world of the dead—much more dimly popular as the dead world may be.

Lafcadio Hearn's mystical outlook and inward examining bring one just to the right mood for our subject—the making of gods in Japan. We establish a link with the vast unexplored realm whose hither shores we may only cross at the price of the life which nature has so graciously bestowed to preserve, to nourish, and to prize. Something which in exceptional cases will lead us to lay down that life gladly cheerfully; aye, to take the very fortress of one's life by assault in obedience to its call, whatever something it must be, however faint and well worth considering.

Looking below the intense practical working of the modern Japanese mind, its wholly material grasp on material things, its swift assimilation of modern science in its essence as well as its details, we do truly come to another world of thought. With the most agnostic we are told that the ancient beliefs cling to some corner of their mental fabric, that their filial devotion is unbroken, that reverence for the souls of their dead persists in men who believe they have no souls of their own, and that the governing powers of the gods survive in the minds of men who believe mind to be nothing more than a function of matter put into that vibration which we call life. How much more thrilling to the mass of the people still believing simply in the old order of the ruling gods.

In that realm where they rule there is no place for the earth developed instincts that make men barter sharply, chaffer endlessly, and grasp miserably in pursuit of gain, with greed and avarice at one's elbow. No, here are self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, self-immolation on their thrones, and all men must bow down before them. Whatever that realm may have been called in the past—religion or what else it is now in Japan what the West calls patriotism.

It is the self-consciousness of Japan that in the highest, most exalted personal terms, and which by its very exaltation tends to react on the mass of the people to its lowest ranks, making a standard for all of the clearest definition. So much for the ground-work of a process of which I witnessed many absorbingly interesting details and the multifarious evidences of the national material outreach of today.

One more fact must be recalled, namely, the fact unique in the world, that the supreme ruler of Japan is himself a god and the direct descendant of the gods in unbroken line. In the Shinto cult, which is the national religion of Japan, the Mikado, the Emperor, is the descendant of the sun goddess. Through him all Japanese are the children of the great gods. He is their sacred father and high placed brother, as well as their unassailable King.

howed head before the tomb of George Washington at Mount Vernon. Feeling of reverence, honor and gratitude for what he was in life to the young nation fills us, but we do not look to him as still originating benefit to us from the other world save through his example and majesty of character. Before Lincoln's tomb we shed tears for his fate and our love of him burns bright in our hearts. Before the tomb of Grant we get a reflex of his iron will in war and the broad view of the great warrior who yet loved peace better than strife.

It is our fashion to express these things concretely and secularly by putting up monumental statuary to our heroes, our teachers, our statesmen in public places with more or less—often less—evidence of taste. The East traditionally has avoided that, but Japan in the last score of years has adopted it to some extent and with generally deplorable results.

The native attempts at portrait statuary in bronze as seen on the squares of Tokyo in a score or more of offices clad in terrible frock coats or implacably stiffened, long skirted uniforms are discouraging. The fine monument to Toyotomi Hideyoshi with its powerful equestrian figure of the Japanese Hannibal is a striking exception. How much finer, because in line with the genius of the people, were the votive temples to those whom Japan or its rulers loved to honor in the past!

Our present business, however, is not with the modern monuments but with the modern movement, in considering the existing causes which in Japan to-day are gradually inducing certain great souls into the higher ranks of the national gods. The most pointed example, the most obvious, I may say, of the century is the Emperor Meiji, now known by his celestial name as Meiji (which means "Enlightened Government"), the monarch of the Restoration, whose hand was on the helm of state on its passage through all the archipelago of revolution until she anchored after two great foreign wars victorious and secure behind the great breakwater of the Constitution in the wide harbor of peace and progress.

It was indeed a new, a great Japan, from which he victoriously departed some two years ago. Tall of frame, mentally virile, kind of heart, considerate, helpful, he stood morally worthy of his human destiny making, ever a predominant figure where a figurehead had been expected. His long reign of forty-four years endeared him more and more to his people, and has formed that deep and massive reverence on which his name is surely being lifted among the Powers that men of his nation will pray to and invoke for centuries to come.

It will be recognized that over and beyond the ceremonies which the court, the hierarchy, the Government, may bestow on such a monarch and such a notable man, it is by the subtle assent of a whole people that the enduring honors of a memory secure. In this it may well be held that the Emperor Meiji rests secure.

In Catholic countries a titular sainthood is bestowed by the Roman church at the end of a long lapse of time after death, in which the man or woman of distinctively godly life has passed under sharp scrutiny by the Church through the respective stages of being named the venerable and the blessed before entering the high honor of the holy. In Japan, it is safe to say, all the powers of State and nation conjoin in the one thought and signs of his death, on war history prove equal or superior to his, but in seeing where he stands apart that we shall come to some appreciation of why he has soared on the wings of Japan's imagination into the high home of her celestials.

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Just as they treasure an art object for qualities of perfection which have been proved to the smallest details, so they are capable of, and fond of, judging a man's life by the rules of the aesthetic, as well as of the ethical. If a keen examination should disclose that the theatre seemed to have had some share in Nogi's illustration of the dramatic in his life, it is all in vain, such a vein that the less radiant, more showy—in a word, the more self-conscious—that it exhibits belongs to the highest drama in its austerity and final sacrifice.

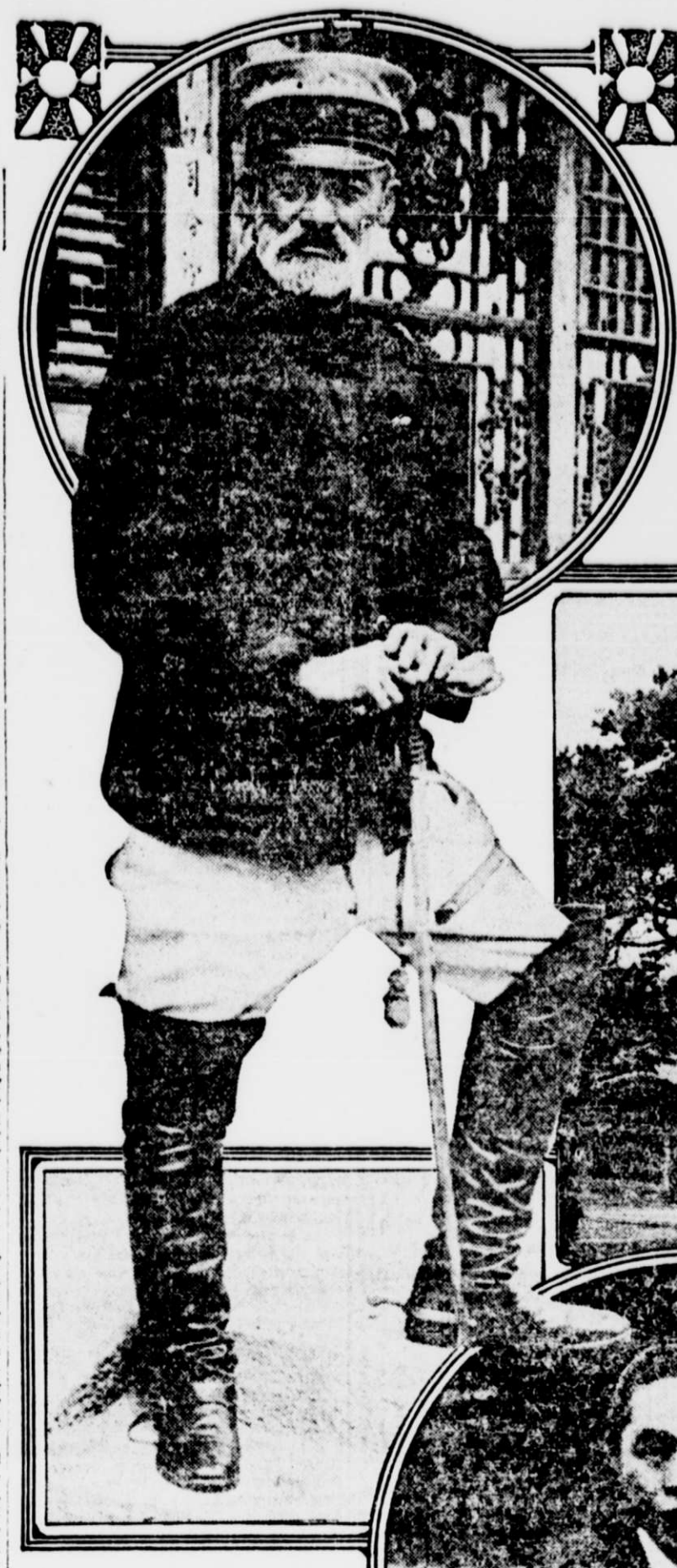
Gen. Nogi came out of the Russian war fully equal in popular acclaim to Fleet Admiral Count Togo, who stood for Japan's victorious navy as Nogi did for all the great qualities of her army.

Not only because he was distinguished but because he was unique was he the chosen of the people for passionate love and admiration. He was so delicate when a boy that his father, fearing that his son would never make a sturdy samurai, nicknamed him "Mujin," meaning one who would never be worthy to enter the knightly class.

Constant exercises, however, under the strict discipline of old Japan overcame his weakness of constitution, so much so that he was strong enough to engage in a fist fight which he won in the rebellion of the tenth year of Meiji.

His expertness in the art of fighting, his learning and his upright character finally induced his lord to appoint him tutor to the heir apparent. And so he grew in years and wisdom.

Next we behold him a grim, silent man, who had commanded a brigade with honor in the capture of Port Arthur from the Chinese. He found himself ten years later in command of the Third Army, assigned to the same task against the immeasurably stronger fortress which the Russians had made of the former Chinese stronghold.



Gen. Count Kiten Nogi, one of the gods of Japan.

Kuroki, for instance, should stand the peer of any captain of the war that held a like command. The records of Gens. Nogi and Oku are hardly inferior, and even Gen. Kawamura, the last appointed leader of an army in the campaign, although operating in but one battle, developed high qualities of the soldier.

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I would say first of all that it is because of a touching dramatic completeness in his life and his death. No people are more responsive to the dramatic appeal than the people of Nippon. It cries out to their artistic sense.

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A Spartan simplicity characterized his soldier life. Unsparring of himself, fearing no privation, he exacted the utmost of obedience and devotion from the highest to the last soldier of his command. Without flamboyant appeal an electric vibration of patriotism exalted that of the other four army commanders of the Russian campaign is doubtful. A brilliant soldier like



Mrs. Nogi, who joined her husband in suicide on the Emperor's death.

palen was proof of its potency. If ever a mystic influence of devotion came from two dark eyes in the world it came from his.

He had two sons—his only children—both bred to arms as he had been. Both went to the war, splendid types of young Japan. The younger was a Lieutenant with Gen. Oku's army and was killed in the action for storming the heights of Nanshan, the first land battle in the march upon Port Arthur.

As a sequel to that sharp fight, Gen. Nogi's army began landing at Daini, and the General shortly after visited the scene of the death of his son.

He saw and listened, tearless and in silence, and rode solitary away. Then out of the depths of his nature he wrote a little poem, here translated, which went to the heart of Japan:

With halting steed and silent lips I
By Kinohou Castle in the setting sun.

Its aloofness and its sense of desolation, the scrupulous elegance of its form in classic metre, have endeared it since to the nation high and low.

Deadly strife around the Russian fortifications of Port Arthur thenceforth began. Day and night, months through, sleeping little, eating little, the Spartan spirit in him wrestled with his giant task. Line after line of the aptly called "human bullets" he hurled against the defenses with awful slaughter of the Japanese and with little real effect upon the beleaguered. It was not indeed until late in the year that he saw the futility of his costly infantry attacks unless backed by artillery of the highest power attainable.

Accordingly 11 inch guns from the navy and the land fortifications of Japan were set up back of his lines. Thenceforward the fortress crumbled fort by fort and height by height until Stoessel's surrender of January 2, 1905, crowned that part of Nogi's

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Steel bolts have torn the crest and side:

Now men gaze up to thee in grief and pride.

Mount of the soul!
By an ideographic coincidence the Japanese signs for 203 Meter Hill signify "Mount of the Soul" in Chinese. The General naturally implied the one in setting down the other. No other sign of grief he gave, but here his hopes of posterity ended. Here came a turn to his joy in life, but not to his toll. He marched his victorious army north to join the armies facing Kuroki's 300,000 Russians at Mukden, and there hung so fiercely on the Maschovitz flank that the disastrous flight of their army followed, and final victory came to Japan.

So at end of the war we see him returned to Japan an idol of the people as embodying the soldier's spirit in every desired manifestation—courage, obedience, serenity, determination, resource, skill, loyalty, devotion. Honors were showered upon him. In his eyes he had held for real his ascription to the virtues of the Emperor as the true source of the victory on land and sea. In return the Emperor held him in

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Gen. Count Nogi, the Hero of Mukden, and His Wife Deified by Suicide on Emperor's Death

followed, with the sure condemnation and the dreadful finish as already told—a finish that is told to-day while faces are glad with smiles and eyes shining with unfeigned delight.

The temple burial place where the little squared headstones of the forty-seven stand in a touching oblong is the shrine most thronged every day in the year. Before every stone incense is burned by the visitors. Not one is neglected.

For the grave of the youngest the incense receptacle is many times the largest. I laid my bundle of sticks upon the grave of the oldest, who in this competition of the dead ordinarily had the fewest. Poor old chap! There is a museum of the Ronin relics in the temple itself, and there the pious and curious linger fascinated.

Gen. Nogi's grave is enclosed by a stone wall about three feet high, surmounted by two feet of iron railing. It is a little lot, maybe four by five yards square. The General's headstone is to the right, an unfashioned stone, point upward. His wife's, smaller, more rounded, is to the left. The inscription on the stone is in Japanese. Shreds of paper symbolizing purity stand out like snow spirits among the lustrous dark green leaves with serrated edges.

There is a box for visiting cards, a quaint bit of Japanese ceremony. Many small, round, white, two-sided stones are scattered about the railing. Sockets filled with fresh cut flowers were on either side of the two main graves.

To the grave in reverent stream came the people, passing with bowed head, peering as we peered, but with surely a deeper thought.

At the museum, at the house, at the grave the same intensity of interest. One felt in all the natural growth of the legendary hero of a nation. What has conjured to make that growth have somewhat of a life.

In looking at it out of alien eyes we know that we cannot gauge it all, for the outcrochings of a religious belief that brings generation after generation into eerie communion with a ghostly world as part of its daily thought are utterly beyond us. That it all sits comfortably on a perfectly modern and normal life makes it the stranger still.

Of course, as indicated above, they have more than one god in the making even now in Japan. As the